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A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour over a network of 47 associate NBC radio stations, Tuesday, March 15, 1932.

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I think most of us prefer fresh fruits and vegetables and for that reason we are interested in anything that will extend the season during which we can have fresh products from our gardens. You market gardeners know that just a few days in the earliness of a crop may make a big difference in the prices you receive. One way that we can lengthen the growing season is by starting certain plants indoors or in hotbeds, coldframes, or in small greenhouses. Another way is to cover the plants with protectors of some kind after they are set in the garden.

If you were to visit the gardening sections of France at this time of the year, you would find thousands of plants being grown to maturity under glass bell-jars. You would see whole gardens filled with these glass covers that are used to protect the plants early in the spring and again in the late fall.

We have not used the bell-jars to any extent in this country but we do employ several substitutes for them. For instance, we use cones made of parafin or wax treated paper, sheets of waxed paper spread over the plants, wooden frames with a piece of glass over the top, also a plant protector consisting of three pieces of glass held together in the form of a triangle to form the sides and a parchment paper covering over the top. Our growers use these different protectors mostly for protecting early tomato or pepper plants, hills of early snap beans, cucumbers, melons, squashes, and sometimes to cover the hills of early sweet corn. I know of one gardener who uses his glass protectors very early in the season to protect plants of head lettuce, then when the protectors are no longer needed on the lettuce he transfers them to hills of snap beans and finally to his melons and cucumbers.

You folks who live in the south have the advantage of us northerners during normal seasons because you can have a number of the more hardy crops growing in your gardens all winter. We came near doing that here at Washington the present winter, that is until the storm of last week struck us. According to reports of low temperatures all through the south recently most of the tender vegetables must be killed which will mean that southern gardeners will have to start all over again.

The time is just about here when the north central gardeners can plant all of the more hardy vegetables in their gardens. Many people believe that day-after-tomorrow, St. Patrick's Day, is the proper time to plant early potatoes, in fact they would almost go out in rubber boots and a slicker in order to plant their potatoes on St. Patrick's Day. I don't believe in carrying it to that extreme but I do believe in planting potatoes and the seeds of beets, radishes, lettuce, onions, spinach, kale, mustard, and in fact all of the more hardy crops just about as soon as the ground is in condition for working. You market gardeners know from experience that early to plant generally means early to market.

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You can plant early cabbage very early if you set the plants on the south side of ridges then later when the weather is warmer you can level the soil around the plants. Spring winds often damage your early planted tomato and other tender plants. Here is a way you can overcome that difficulty. Get a bundle of ordinary wooden shingles and set one or two of them in the ground on the windward side of each plant, or if you can not get the shingles take small pieces of board and sharpen them at one end so that they can be stuck into the ground. If you wish to protect your plants from the direct sunshine when they are first set, place a shingle or piece of board on the sunny side of each plant.

Many of our Florida gardeners use wooden troughs made by nailing two 8 or 10-inch boards together in the form of a V to protect their plants. The rows of plants are run east and west and on cold nights and stormy days they turn the troughs over the rows of plants. Then when the sun comes out bright and warm they place the troughs on the north side of the rows to protect the plants from the wind.

Sheets of parchment paper are often used to protect hills of melons and other low-growing tender plants from both cold and wind. The paper is folded so as to form a sort of canopy over the plants and is held in place by heaping a little soil on its edges. If you wish to protect taller plants like tomatoes and peppers you had better use wax-coated paper cones or caps and weight their edges with soil to hold them in place.

You northern gardeners who want to force a few hills of rhubarb should get empty barrels, knock the bottoms out of them and set a barrel over each hill of rhubarb, then haul a quantity of manure from the horse stable and bank it all around the barrels. The heat generated by the manure will warm the soil and protect the leafstalks from the cold. If there should be a cold night or two you can easily cover the tops of the barrels with old bags or with boards to keep out the cold.

If you plant your garden on the south side of a building, a tight board fence or a close growing hedge, where it will be protected from the cold winds and get plenty of sunshine, you can mature radishes, beets, lettuce, carrots and other early crops several days before they would be ready for use if planted in an exposed place. There really are a great many ways to hurry your early crops along, and I think it pays to go to the trouble of using these special methods of getting fresh vegetables ready for your table or the market extra early.